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Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 02219 111953Z

56
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-11 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

INRE-00 USIE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-05 SAJ-01 SAM-01 SY-05

A-01 OPR-02 /089 W
---------- 094789
O R 111458Z MAR 76
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8971
INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TELAVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
USMISSION USUN NY
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 02219 111953Z

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

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COMSIXTHFLT
CTF SIX ZERO
CTF SIX ONE
CTF SIX TWO
CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO
FOSIF ROTA SPAIN
FICUERLANT NORFOLD VA
DIA WASHDC
CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2219

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 3)

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINT, LE
SUBJ: ARMY CRISIS DOMINATES SCENE

SUMMARY: SYRIA APPARENTLY HAS ORDERED ACTION BY PLA AGAINST LEBANONESE ARMY MUNITEERS, AS GOL OFFERS NOW AMNESTY. WHOEVER, PLA HAS NOT YET MOVED. EARLIER, LOYAL LEBANESE ARMY OFFICERS HAD ISSUED STATEMENT DEMANDING ACTION CABINET NEGOTIATIONS TAKING SECOND PRIORITY UNTIL SECURITY CRUSIS RESOLVED, ALTHOUGH TALKS STILLUNDERWAY ON CABINET ISSUE. END SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH BEIRUT NEWSPAPER HEADLINES MARCH 11 SPEAK OF ATTEMPTED "COUP D'ETAT" AND NEAR "RESIGNATION" OF FRANGIE, SERIOUSNESS OF SITUATION NOT YET AT SUCH DRASTIC POINT DESPITE POLITICAL APPREHENSIONS RAISED BY ARMY DE-SERTIONS. WE ARE AT ANOTHER TURNING POINT, HOWEVER, AS NEXT FEW DAYS WILL TELL WHETHER ARMY DISINTEGRATION WILL BE REVERSED OR WILL LEAD TO DRAMATIC POLITICAL CONSE-QUENCES.

2. THROUHGOUT MARCH 10 NEWS REACHING BEIRUT OF FURTHER TAKEOVERS OF ARMY POSTS BY DISSIDENT TROOPS KEPT CITY ON EDGE. SEVERAL POSTS NEAR TRIPOLI AND ZGHORTA FELL TO FOLLOWERS OF MAJ. MAMARY, AND THE MARJAYOUN BARRACKS FELL TO KHATIB IN THE SOUTH. LIFE IN CAPITAL STAYED GEN-ERALLY NORMAL UNTIL AFTERNOON WHEN ROADBLOCKS AP-
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 02219 111953Z

PEARED IN CERTAIN PLACES AND KIDNAPPINGS OCCURRED. AREA MOST AFFECTED WAS AIN EL-MREISSEH NEAR EM-BASSY (SEE BEIRUT 2203 DTG 111018Z MAR 76 NOTAL).

3. STRONG REACTION OF LOYAL OFFICERS TO ARMY DE-SERTIONS MADE ITSELF FELT FOR FIRST TIME MARCH 10. AIR FORCE COMMANDER GEORGES GHARBI ISSUED STATEMENT RECOMMENDING (A) AMNESTY FOR DESERTERS EXCEPT FOR

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PERPETRATORS OF CRIMES, (B) "RADICAL MEASURES" TO SAVE
THE ARMY, (C) IMPOSING BALANCE WITHIN THE ARMY, (D)
FORMING A BALANCED GOVERNMENT. THIS INSPIRED A
GROUP OF 70 HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS, CHRISTIANS AND
MOSLEM, TI ISSUE A PUBLIC DEMAND FOR IMMEDIATE
ACTION TO PRESERVE THE ARMY. COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
HANNA SA'ID THEN PUBLICLY APPEALED FOR AMNESTY ALONG
LINES SUGGESTED BY GHARIB. THIS SERIES OF ACTIONS,
IN WHICH MANY OF OFFIERS INVOLVED WERE CLEARLY PRE-
PARED TO RESIGN IF MEASURES WERE NOT TAKEN, MAY BE
WHAT THE PRESS REFERS TO AS THE "COUP D'ETAT," ALTHOUGH
OTHER MORE DRAMATIC STORES ARE ALSO CIRCULATING IN
THE BEIRUT RUMOR CIRCUIT WORKING OVERTIME. THE
OFFICERS' MOVES WERE EVIDENTLY INSTRUMENTAL IN CABI-
NET ACTION LATE MARCH 10 OFFERING AMNESTY UNTIL 0700 HOURS
LOCAL MARCH 11 TO ENLISED MEN WHO HAD DESERTED EXCLUSIVE OF
THOSE COMMITTING CRIMES W. (WE UNDERSTAND DISSIDENT OFFIVERS
WILL BE ALLOWED TO RESIGN, BUT NO FULLY AMNESTIED.)

4. SYRIAN CHIEF-OF-STAFF SHIHABI ARRIVED SUDDENLY MARCH 10
APPARENTLY WITH ORDERS TO PLA TO REOCCUPY POSTS TAKEN BY MUTINEERS.
ACCORDING TO ONE SOURCE, GOL OFFER OF AMNESTY WAS
REPORTED A CONDITION FOR THIS TOUGH ACTION. LATEST
REPORTS MARCH 11ARE THAT PLA HAS YET TO MOVE, AND
THAT SYRIANS TRYING NOGOTIATE WITH KHATIB. MANY BEIRUTIS,
PARTICULARLY RIGHTISTS, ARE SKEPTICAL THAT SYRIANS OR
PLA WILL BE POLITICALLY ABLE MOVE STRONGLY AGAINST
KHATIB. MEANWHILE TENSION REMAINS HIGH IN CAPITAL,
AND THERE IS REPORT THAT KATAEB MILITIA IN ASHRAFIAY
QUARTER IS ACTIVELY PREPARING FOR WORST, ALTHOUGH
STAYING OFF STREETS.

5. FRANGIE'S NEAR "RESIGNATION" REPORTED IN
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PAGE 04 BEIRUT 02219 111953Z

MARCH 11 PRESS WAS AN OFFER HE MADE TO KHADDAM AND
OTHERS TWO DAYS EARLIER, POSSIBLY REPEATED MARCH 10,
THAT HE WOULD RESIGN IF THAT WOULD HELP RESTORE ORDER.
KHADDAM AND THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP
TALKED HIM OUT OF IT. IT REMAAINS A TOPIC ON EVERY-
BODY'S TONGUE, HOWEVER, AND THE NEW-FOUND JUMBLATT-
EDDE-SALAM AXIS MAY BE TRYING TO EXPLOIT THE CURRENT
TROUBLES TWOARD THIS END, IN THE TRADITION OF POLITICAL
BRINKSMANSHIP THAT HAS PLAGUED LEBANON FOR SO LONG.
AT PRESENT, FRANGIE LOOKS LIKE STAYING UNTIL THE END
OF HIS TERM. SHOULD THE ARMY DISINTEGRATION CON-
TINUE FOR SEVERAL DAYS WITHOUT LETUP,HOWEVER, THE
ODDS OF A DRASTIC "SOLUTION" OF THIS NATURE WILL RISE.

6. THE SNOWBALLING SECURITY CRISIS HAS PUT NEGOTIA-

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TIONS FOR A NEW CABINET ON BACK BURNER TEMPORARILY,
BUT TALKS ARE STILLUNDER WAY. NEARLY EVER DAY SEES
A SLIGHTLY NEW LIST OF NAMES, MOST OF THEM NOW NUMBER-
ING SIXTEEN OR EIGHTEEN. JUMBLATT APPARENTLY IS STILL
BARGAINING HARD FOR STRONG REPRESENTATIONBY LEFTIST
PARTY REPRESENTATIVES,WHO ARE MAINLY NOT DEPUTIES,
AND HE MAY GET MUCH OF HIS WAY. JUMBLATT IS ALSO
SAID TO INSIST THAT A REPRESENTATIVE OF EDDE'S PARTY
BE IN THE CABINET. REACTION OF RIGHTISTS, INCLUDING
CHAMOUN, LESS CLEAR AT THIS STAGE, AS THEY ARE PRE-
OCCUPED WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR THEM OF SECURITY
CRISIS.

7. WE HAVE JUST LEARED THAT ARMY COMMANDER OF THE NORTRTH
IGADIER GENERAL ABDUL MAJID CHEHAB, A SUNI MOLLEM,WAS
STOPPED AND KILLED ON THE ROAD ABOUT MIDDAY. NOT
YET SURE WHO KILLED HIM, THOUGH RUMOR HAS IT AS CHRISTIANS.
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To: STATE
Type: TE
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